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ABSTRACT

This document reports on the Alliance for Employee Growth and Development, which is a partnership among the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T), the Communications Workers of America, and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. After an introduction, the first section of the report describes how the alliance originated in response to AT&T employees' need to find jobs, transfer skills, and acquire new skills after court-ordered divestiture of the company in 1982. The alliance mission statement is also provided. The second section explains the relationship between the national co-executive directors, the director, and the 226 alliance local committees. The third and fourth sections describe the first alliance activity, which was to respond to the announced closing of AT&T's international operators, center in Springfield, Massachusetts, in October 1987. The alliance program model is also described. The next sections describe alliance activities that followed the announcement of layoffs at the Merrimack Valley Works in North Andover, Massachusetts and the closing of AT&T facilities at Rapid City, South Dakota, both in 1987; and the transition of AT&T operator services to new technology in 1988, which necessitated retraining or finding jobs for approximately 8,000 former operators. The last section emphasizes that the alliance is intended to help employees manage their careers at all times, not only when they are faced with a layoff. (CML)

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Brief

Reports on Significant Literature and Events

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THE ALLIANCE FOR EMPLOYEE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT:

A Joint Venture that Works

by Constance Alexander

"When I went to work for the phone company 15 years ago, I thought I had it made. Thought I didn't have to worry any more. Thought I'd have a job for the rest of my life. And then that changed. I was stunned. There were tears. They came no matter how hard I tried to stop them."

Former AT&T Telephone Operator
Rapid City, South Dakota

From Rapid City to Corpus Christi, Massachusetts to Missouri—coast to coast, border to border—thousands of AT&T employees struggle with the aftershocks of divestiture. Some relocate to keep old jobs, others retrain for new ones. Some stay with the company, others seek employment elsewhere. Some go back to school. Some retire.

Such changes can be overwhelming, especially when they affect fundamental aspects of people's lives—where they work, what they do, and how they live.

Until now, AT&T employees—like the operator in South Dakota—seldom had career plans to guide their decision making. Nor did they have information to assess the local employment climate to find outside job opportunities. If they needed or wanted training to pursue a different career interest, courses were unavailable, or classes met at times that did not fit into a shift worker's schedule. In many cases, when the specter of job change or unemployment loomed, AT&T union-represented employees had no grasp of their marketable skills and no real sense of how they wanted their working lives to progress.

Constance Alexander is a freelance writer based in Murray, Kentucky.

The experience of the Rapid City telephone operator is one of many stories about unplanned and unanticipated job change that begins with tears and ends in triumph because of the Alliance for Employee Growth and Development. The Alliance, as it is called, is a cooperative, yet independent, venture among AT&T, the Communications Workers of America (CWA), and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)—a partnership designed to help individuals improve existing skills and develop new ones. Its growth stems from the belief that the company and unions—working together—can make a difference in the bottom line of the corporation, in the strength of the unions, and in the working lives of employees.

GETTING STARTED

The Alliance grew from the need of AT&T employees for a better way to find jobs, transfer old skills, or acquire new ones to successfully enter the high-tech communications world of the 21st century.

Founded in 1875, AT&T operated as a regulated monopoly, with 23 operating telephone companies, a private research laboratory, a manufacturing organization, and a long-distance communication network. In such an environment, employees enjoyed long-term employment security that met their individual needs and served the needs of the business as well.

With court-ordered divestiture on January 8, 1982, however, AT&T was forced into the most sweeping business reorganization in the history of the United States. AT&T had just two years to assess the impact of its new role in the business world and adjust its structure accordingly.

Prior to divestiture, AT&T had more than one million employees. At divestiture, the restructured company employed approximately 371,000 people, of which 245,000 were unionized. Since 1984 the ranks have been trimmed even further, to 311,000, with 175,000 union-represented employees.

The issue of employment security, nothing new in collective bargaining, took on a new sense of urgency at AT&T after divestiture. AT&T, CWA, and the IBEW recognized the importance of retaining a dedicated, skilled, and loyal work force. With rapidly changing technology and increasingly fierce, global competition, however, both the company and union bargainers realized that employment security had to be within a framework which would enhance the long-term viability of the business itself.

While the company and the unions agreed on one fundamental aspect of the employment security issue—that it was crucial—they disagreed on how to address it. In 1984 and again in 1985, the parties tried repeatedly to find common ground on the issue, without success. Ken Ross, one of AT&T's representatives at those sessions, and now an Alliance co-executive director, explains the breakthrough: "We had been looking at the problem from a company or a union viewpoint. Eventually, we started to understand that employment security is an *individual* issue. Numbers and percentages don't count. When you have a job, employment is 100 percent. When you're out of work, it's zero."

From that turning point, negotiations moved forward with attempts to define

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employment security. The conclusion was that security meant having good, marketable skills—not necessarily working at the same job, with the same company, forever. Furthermore, employment security was recognized as a *mutual* benefit, providing significant advantages for the company, the unions, and the individual.

The Alliance for Employee Growth and Development, first established in the 1986 collective bargaining contract, is based on a belief in the inestimable value of AT&T employees and in their ability to grow and change with the company. A not-for-profit organization separate from AT&T, CWA, and IBEW, the Alliance is funded by them through a formula specified by contract language. Its purpose is to help unionized employees plan for the future and to support them in acquiring the skills and experience they need to maximize their long-term employability.

The Alliance Mission Statement

AT&T, the Communications Workers of America, and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers share a vision that the growth and development of the individual is the key to success in a competitive worldwide marketplace.

The Alliance for Employee Growth and Development was born out of this shared vision to serve as a resource to individual employees who want to take charge of managing change in their own lives.

The Alliance mission is to support individual efforts to develop career and personal growth and enhance employability through continuing learning experiences. The success of these individual efforts will be assured by the cooperative activities of the Alliance, CWA, IBEW, and AT&T.

LEAN STRUCTURE WITH LOCAL SUPPORT AT THE CORE

Ken Ross and Don Treinen, co-executive directors of the Alliance, are sometimes jokingly called "Ken/Don" by their constituents, as if they were one person. With almost half a century of AT&T and union experience under their belts, they understand the culture of both groups and are well equipped to deal with AT&T, CWA, IBEW, and a host of other institutions and governmental bodies from their Somerset, New Jersey, headquarters. Along with the Alliance director, Marshall Goldberg, the three provide a solid foundation of practical experience and professional achievement. Ross and Treinen fulfill the executive officer role, while Goldberg focuses more on operations. "They bring in the ideas," Goldberg explains, "and I plan the programs. I guess you'd say I'm the implementor."

The guiding principles for the Alliance boil down to three essentials: organization, structure, and commitment.

The organization needs to be a separate entity from all stakeholder groups and should be staffed by professionals who have expertise in training and development.

The heart of the structure is the system of Alliance Local Committees (ALCs), since they are in the best position to understand local needs and to gain credibility with employees. Generally, these committees are peopled with equal company/union representation.

> ***"We started to understand that employment security is an individual issue. When you have a job, employment is 100 percent. When you're out of work, it's zero."***
>
> *—Ken Ross*

The third guiding principle, commitment, is expressed most effectively by the Alliance in action. Individuals take advantage of programs on their own time. Company and union representatives roll up their sleeves and work with whomever needs their help. People pitch in.

The ALCs are the linchpin of the system. Local committees are on-site, easily accessible. They have first-hand knowledge of local situations—and first-hand understanding of the political dynamics that need to be shaped for change.

With the help of the national Alliance staff, these committees are the pipeline to a nationwide network of resources that enable employees to match their skills with their needs for personal growth and development. The Alliance consultants advise ALCs and provide a single point of contact for answering questions, dealing with local issues, and managing the vast storehouse of information from AT&T, the unions, and other national resources.

The role of staff consultant is a challenging one. As director Goldberg puts it: "We have to figure out when we need to be on-site and when we need to stay away. We have to assist, not lead, if we are going to be effective."

Currently there are about 226 ALCs operating, with that number growing steadily as news of the Alliance and its programs filters out to AT&T employees through formal lines of communication and informal networks.

Goldberg points out the importance of applying the best staff expertise to each local situation, regardless of geography. "If we say the individual is the key to success, the best way to illustrate our philosophy is by the example we set as we work with ALCs."

It is this structure that has carried forward the Alliance's efforts to help more than 22,000 employees in 44 states.

SPRINGFIELD: CHAPTER ONE IN THE ALLIANCE STORY

The ink on the Alliance mission statement was barely dry when the closing of AT&T's international operators' center in Springfield, Massachusetts, was announced on October 12, 1986. Though rumors had circulated for months, no one was really prepared for the announcement: The facility was slated to close in slightly more than a year, by October 31, 1987. After that, operator-assisted international calls would be handled by a center with the newest technology, located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

At the time of announcement, there were 198 employees in Springfield. Ultimately, 187 of them would need placement. The average age was 39, with 12 years at AT&T. Over 90 percent were women. Some were from dual income families, many were single heads of households. Others were constrained in their ability to relocate by divorce decrees. Regardless of the individual's situation, loss of a job could mean inability to meet essential, everyday expenses.

On the day of the announcement, employees were brought in groups to the Springfield boardroom. Representatives from AT&T and the CWA made a joint presentation and pledged to provide whatever support was needed to place people in other jobs, both within AT&T and outside. A joint union-management group would interview individual employees to identify their needs and preferences. And, should they wish to relocate, all employees were promised jobs in Pittsburgh.

Despite reassurances by Ken Jehling, AT&T district manager, and Steve Curtin, President of CWA Local 1051, many operators had tears in their eyes, anxiety etched into their faces. "My heart stopped beating," one woman—a single parent with a teenager—confesses.

Other international operator centers had closed already, so the Springfield operators were not alone. Overall, however, the situation set the tone for the future in several ways. First, employees were given a full year's notice to prepare for the closing. Second, a joint committee of company and union representatives was formed to ease the transition and to provide active assistance to employees, whether they were opting for relocation to Pittsburgh or not. Community resources

were lined up as well, including the mayor of Springfield and representatives of the Massachusetts Career Development Institute.

The third difference, however, is the most important one. The Springfield international operators' center closing was the first situation in which the Alliance would transform contract language into specific programs designed to enhance the long-term employability of workers.

The joint committee launched a series of individual interviews to help employees start planning for the future. Group career planning sessions were conducted. At the same time, Alliance personnel—primarily Ross and Treinen—were serving as consultants to the Springfield committee while trying to staff their new organization.

One of the first official acts of the Alliance in the Springfield plant was to help secure a new on-site manager for the international operators' center, not an easy task considering the impending closing. Ross and Treinen took it upon themselves to find someone who could work effectively and cooperatively with CWA in re-establishing local committee efforts on behalf of employees. Mike Pucci, a manager from the Pittsburgh international operators' center, fit the bill.

When Pucci arrived in the beginning of January, the situation was not ideal. "It was depressing," he confesses. "People felt abandoned."

Pucci rolled up his sleeves and pitched in—exemplifying the empowerment concept that is an integral part of the Alliance approach. Pucci's first step in Springfield was to spend time talking to each person affected by the closing. "They needed to know that someone cared," he explains.

His second step was purely practical. Operators were working overtime to meet the volume of calls they handled. Pucci arranged for traffic transfers so people would have time available for career planning activities. Thus, Springfield's hours of operation were reduced from 24 hours daily to 16.

Pucci brought in a personnel supervisor, Joan Langevin, to assist the local committee. Langevin started meeting regularly with the committee to support the cooperative efforts of the company and union in conducting successful programs, securing qualified vendors, and assessing their ongoing progress.

"I can't tell you how scared we were," Pucci confesses. "I'd never experienced a closing myself, and the only ones I'd seen or heard about were bad ones. And here we had 187 people's lives in our hands."

Through the combined efforts of AT&T, CWA, the Alliance, and people like Steve Curtin, Mike Pucci, and others, when the Springfield facility actually closed its doors on October 31, 1987, from a total of 187 employees:

- 121 employees were placed with AT&T in other locations,
- 14 were placed in the outside labor market in the Springfield area,
- 17 retired,
- 5 left on disability,
- 5 enrolled in education sponsored by the Alliance,
- 4 enrolled in local Job Training Partnership Act programs, and
- 21 elected to remain until closing, take termination payments, and leave AT&T without seeking other employment.

According to Steve Curtin, a 22-year veteran of AT&T, "Springfield was done as right as a closing possibly can be." At a final coffee and cake gathering for the few remaining operators, Pucci received a standing ovation. "At that point," he says, "I knew it went well."

VALUABLE LESSONS FROM SPRINGFIELD

The closing of the Springfield international operators' center was the Alliance's first challenge, and it represented an incomplete case study at best. Decisions on the closing had already been made, but basic tenets of the Alliance guided the process once the announcement was made public. "It would have been better if the Alliance was involved earlier," one of the operators asserts. And the Alliance agrees.

If he could do it all over again, Mike Pucci says, "We would form a local committee and get the cooperative spirit going before there was any threat of layoffs. We'd outline the Alliance programs and get people signed up right away. In Springfield, there was a time lag." Pucci points out, "Expectations were built up in the series of individual meetings, but programs weren't readily available. It would be better to have the groundwork laid early."

Another essential lesson from Springfield was to avoid making assumptions. Most of the operators in Springfield were women, many of them single parents. Initially, it was assumed that there would be few willing candidates for relocation. Actually, however, there were a number of people interested in the relocation option.

The Alliance Program Model

The Alliance provides programs and services for all eligible union employees, whether they are facing the loss of a job or not. Through its network of Alliance local committees, programs are customized to suit local needs. While programs vary from location to location, the process generally includes the following:

1. Local committees are formed—with equal company and union representation—to secure information/assistance from the Alliance technical staff.
2. The local committee informs the rest of the local work force about the Alliance and the kinds of programs it offers.
3. Local committees administer Background Information Surveys (BIS), a simple questionnaire that assesses work force needs and priorities. Committee staff analyzes the results and develops a preliminary plan of action.
4. Local committee staff presents a preliminary plan of programs and services to offer the work force. The committee secures employee feedback and approval.
5. Working with the Alliance technical staff, local committees select vendors and training courses through a variety of sources: local colleges, universities, and community colleges, outside sources, AT&T, and the Alliance.
6. The committee evaluates the quality of services rendered through workshops and training programs and provides feedback on vendors to the Alliance staff.

The Alliance program enables employees to choose from a variety of opportunities. Employees facing layoff, for instance, may need basic job search skills, career counseling and guidance, skills or technical training, or prepaid tuition assistance. For those considering retirement, financial planning is crucial. Relocation workshops are offered for those interested in continued employment with AT&T in another city. And for those interested in jobs outside the company, there is a rigorous analysis of the area's job market.

In the past, some of these programs have been available but never with a comprehensive, local support system that requires joint—and equal—involvement of company and unions. Moreover, through the Alliance, employees receive individual and group counseling and coaching to guide them as they plan for the future.

Throughout the process, the Alliance staff provides information and on-site assistance as needed.

Pucci emphasizes the importance of freely shared information and expertise in helping to place Springfield operators in new jobs. "Ken Jehling (AT&T manager) and Steve Curtin (CWA local president) were 100 percent supportive, and that made all the difference," according to Pucci. Jehling and Curtin made use of an extended network of contacts that crossed all AT&T and union lines of business and helped find AT&T jobs for people willing to retrain and/or relocate.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the Springfield experience, however, was that it enabled the Alliance to test its simple, straightforward approach to empowering joint local committees that would, in turn, help AT&T workers help themselves.

NEW SITUATIONS CREATE NEW CHALLENGES

Early in 1987, when AT&T announced layoffs at the Merrimack Valley Works in North Andover, Massachusetts, the Alliance faced a set of challenges different from those in Springfield. While Springfield was a center for operator services, Merrimack Valley is a large manufacturing plant that makes transmission equipment. The entire facility closed down in Springfield; the Merrimack Valley Works was slated for layoffs, not shutdown.

Estimates were that approximately 1,400 Merrimack Valley employees would be affected by layoffs, scheduled to be completed by December 1988. The Alliance went to work mobilizing a complex set of resources to help employees take charge of their futures.

State agencies were an important component of the assistance available to Merrimack Valley employees. The Alliance local committee, consisting of representatives from AT&T and CWA, worked with the States of Massachusetts and New Hampshire to establish a Worker Assistance Center at nearby Northern Essex Community College.

With a staff of 10, the Worker Assistance Center was under the auspices of the Massachusetts Department of Employment and Training. The underlying concept of the Worker Assistance Center approach was to establish a one-stop facility for displaced AT&T employees from the Merrimack Valley Works. That idea has since been extended to serve the ongoing training and career counseling needs of remaining employees.

Karen Kimball, one of the staffers at the center, explains the importance of providing such a comprehensive service to employees facing layoffs. "Every person is different, but for everyone a layoff is a crisis. People need as much support as they can get at this time." Kimball emphasizes the use of the center as a meeting place—and a refuge—where displaced employees can meet and talk with their peers. "We have doughnuts and a fresh pot of coffee on all the time," Kimball says.

Besides moral support, employees receive assistance in career planning. Job search workshops, career development activities, vocational counseling, and resume writing are some of the specific programs available through the Worker Assistance Center.

With Federal, State, and Alliance funds available, Merrimack Valley employees enjoyed some unique benefits. For example, those in full-time training programs—such as electronics, environmental waste water control, and office skills—received travel allowances and child-care support.

While some employees chose training that complemented skills they already had, others elected to pursue different career interests. One employee elected to train to become an interpreter for the deaf; another entered a one-year culinary arts program to become a chef. Others with skills in electronic testing and soldering and wiring chose to prepare for careers in nursing, accounting, marketing, and sales.

Although initial projections were for 1,400 layoffs, the actual number of displaced workers was ultimately 1,374. Nine months after the first layoffs, people were being recalled to their old jobs, and about half of them went back. A local labor-management agreement enabled employees to delay their recall until they completed the Alliance training programs they had started.

Today the Alliance local committee is as involved in Merrimack Valley Works as it was in the midst of layoffs. Currently, the committee is implementing programs for active employees and is identifying areas for instruction, such as financial planning and computer literacy.

Ron Ferris, President of CWA Local 1365, sums up the impact of the Alliance programs: "Layoff is the worst situation, but the Alliance made the best of it. Now that some [employees] have been recalled, they got training they wouldn't have had without the Alliance. Our next phase is to use the Alliance for everybody. Then everybody benefits."

As for the employees who were recalled, Ferris says they are the best salespeople for the Alliance. "Because it works," he says.

The success of the Alliance activities in Merrimack Valley has not gone unnoticed outside of AT&T and CWA. The Worker Assistance Center was recently tapped for an Excellence in Performance Award by the Massachusetts Department of Employment and Training. The award is for "superior effort and outstanding achievement in preserving employment, alleviating the impact of a major layoff, and easing the process of adjusting to economic changes for CWA-represented AT&T workers."

Merrimack Valley was also cited for a Governor's Performance Recognition Award in Massachusetts and a U.S. Senate Productivity Award from Senator Bill Bradley (New Jersey). In addition, the Merrimack Valley Works project is being considered for the "Keeping America Working Award," presented by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges annually to recognize partnerships between labor, industry, and colleges working with cooperative venture programs.

OTHER PROGRAMS CREATE NEW OPPORTUNITIES

In September 1987, Pat Lamb Bradford —divorced and a single parent—took a career move to Rapid City, South Dakota, as an AT&T manager of an operator services unit. A few months later, the closing of her facility was announced. Pat and her CWA counterpart, Aleatha Pesek, felt personally responsible for securing other jobs for the 60 operators in their location.

Bradford and Pesek had read about the Alliance, and they contacted the New Jersey headquarters for help.

Both assumed that some kind of prepackaged program would be sent to them, complete with directions on exactly how to proceed. Instead, the Alliance response was not what they expected. "They told us, 'Get yourself a committee and we'll help you,'" recalls Pesek.

Pat Bradford laughs as she remembers. "We went, 'Oh my God. You're not just going to send a package with detailed instructions?'"

The local committee in Rapid City, cochaired by Pesek and Bradford, followed Alliance guidelines to develop an approach to career planning and placement that met local needs. The Rapid City project started with employee career assessments, to help people determine what skills they had that might apply to jobs outside of operator services.

One member of the Alliance local committee, union vice president Sandra Glover, explained that operators do not see the value of the skills they have. "They don't realize that their math, their ability to talk to people, their telephone skills—these are skills that can count for something. Career assessment shows that."

Through the combined efforts of the local committee and Alliance staff, 20 of the 60 operators in Rapid City moved to other AT&T jobs. Forty others wanted

to return to the operating company, Northwestern Bell. Of the total, only six operators left the company, mainly because they did not want to relocate.

One former telephone operator credits the Alliance as a source of new-found satisfaction. "The Alliance really helped me personally. By going through career assessment and getting feedback, I learned I had skills, talents. I got the confidence to go out and do something totally different than being an operator."

OPERATOR SERVICES: AT&T RESPONDS WITH THE ALLIANCE

On the morning of June 14, 1988, at 6:19, a circuit was cut off and a telephone call rerouted through a digital network. That call marked the beginning of a new technological age for handling operator-assisted, long-distance calls. It also signalled the end of an era. That flick of a switch meant that AT&T's operator force of approximately 25,000 would be trimmed by about one-third in the next two to three years. And the total number of operator service centers would decrease from 250 to 100.

These sweeping changes are possible with the introduction of digital, state-of-the-art equipment known as Operator Services Position System, OSPS for short.

In some cases, new operator services offices will open. In other cases, old offices may convert to the new technology. Some will close permanently. The transition to the new technology presents a challenge to the company, the unions, and—most of all—the employees who may be displaced.

Telephone operators—the voice with a smile—have a history of understanding how to meet customer needs, a skill that has become increasingly valuable since AT&T's divestiture. Unlike many other AT&T jobs, operator services positions were subject to layoffs before, during, and after divestiture, especially when old offices closed and new ones opened. In the past, operator services employees received termination pay in these situations, and new employees were hired at the new location.

With increasing emphasis on the importance of a skilled, knowledgeable, and loyal work force, there is a renewed commitment to find operator services employees other positions within AT&T. Skills assessment, career planning, and retraining are, of course, essential to this effort. Not surprisingly, the Alliance has taken a leadership role in making certain that operator services employees are prepared to meet the challenge. For AT&T, the Alliance has become the company's official response to the situation.

Moreover, application of the Alliance principles indicates a shift in staffing strategy. The company is no longer satisfied just to manage downsizing. Working cooperatively with the unions, the company seeks the best use of human resources.

Marshall Goldberg, director of the Alliance, maintains that people are the source of competitive advantage, not just technology. "You invest in the people and you stay on top of the business. It has nothing to do with being a humanitarian. It's nuts and bolts. There's profit in it for individuals as they grow personally and professionally, and there's profit in it for the union and the company."

To assist with the operator services transition to new technology, Alliance representatives participate in a system of company/union committees. A special policy committee, for example, ensures that contractual job security provisions are enforced. In addition, a working committee meets regularly to coordinate implementation teams at local sites.

One of the first achievements of the operator services committees was agreement between AT&T, CWA, and IBEW that workers displaced by the changes will be considered laid-off due to technological change. By doing so, employees were made eligible for contract benefits such as a termination allowance and early retirement. Another milestone was in securing protection for so-called "term employees," those hired for a fixed period of time to ease the operator services transition. Unlike temporary employees, term employees now are eligible for additional benefits, including Alliance services.

"The key is working together. No one segment can take the credit for the success the Alliance is having."

—Joan Toth

Tony Pacifico, AT&T's district manager for labor relations, heads the operator services working committee. Pacifico says, "What we have here is a unique project that I think other companies will use as a model for reductions in the work force. We're trying everything possible to keep operators working. "We'll find them jobs if they're able to move. We'll retrain them if they're willing to be retrained. We're going to work these issues out," Pacifico asserts.

Jean Fawcett, assistant to CWA Vice President Jim Irvine, is on the working committee with Pacifico. "We see Operator Services Position System as an opportunity," Fawcett points out. "For once the company is treating the operators the same way it treats other people in AT&T who are displaced by technological change."

Joan Toth, IBEW Local 1944 President and Business Manager, of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, gives the approach a vote of confidence. "The key is working together. No one segment—AT&T, CWA, or IBEW—can take the credit for the success the Alliance is having."

LOCAL COMMITTEES TAKE THE LEAD

The Alliance has developed a nationwide, fast-track program to recruit and train local committee cochairs in operator services facilities. The program takes advantage of local committee cochairs who already have Alliance programs up and running in their locations, having them act as trainers at regional planning conferences, with hands-on assistance from Alliance technical staff. Mike Pucci, from the Springfield closing, is a workshop presenter. Pat Lamb Bradford—the AT&T manager who cochaired the Rapid City committee—also attends whenever possible.

A recent regional planning conference for operator services local committee cochairs included participants and presenters from many areas around the country. One participant, an AT&T manager, interrupted her honeymoon to attend. "Our office in Wichita is closing," she explained, "and this was just too important to miss."

At that conference, presenters helped new local committee cochairs plan for the future by sharing some of their valuable experiences, including any unique approaches they used to solve problems at the local level.

Cindy Fitch, a cochair from Dallas, talked about people's suspicions of the Alliance when they first heard about it. "Some people asked, 'Is the company going to lay us off first, if we sign up for Alliance programs?' We needed to assure those people of the confidentiality of the process," Fitch explains.

In Dallas, one major issue they faced was the scheduling of career counseling programs to accommodate operators' needs. "Our people work shifts," Fitch explained, "so scheduling is a real challenge. The Alliance won't work if scheduling problems aren't addressed," she asserted.

Gail Greer, a cochair from San Antonio, talked about some special challenges her committee faced. "We felt a lot of our people were at risk of not finding jobs before our office closed." The San Antonio committee contacted the National Bilingual Center for help and also worked with Alliance staff in Austin to help launch programs quickly.

"We pushed extra hard to get people enrolled in school right away," Greer says. Flexibility, an Alliance byword, was essential for developing testing schedules. "We held two half-day sessions instead of one full day. Most of our people don't have enough time as it is to spend with their families, and taking away a whole day for testing

would be hard on them. So it made sense to spread testing out over two days."

Gail Greer, and others who attend regional planning conferences for operator services personnel, participate in shirt-sleeve planning sessions while they network with other Alliance cochairs. Participants hear countless stories from peers who have mastered the challenges they are just beginning to manage. Most of the stories, like Ann Duck's, have happy endings.

Duck, an operator and union steward in Florida's Local 3122, is amazed at the changes she has made in her life because of her involvement with the Alliance. She is currently a freshman studying labor relations in a college program that allows her to draw on her life experiences. "I was never much of a student when I was a kid," she confesses, "but the Alliance gave me the courage to go back to school. It's been that way for lots of operators."

A BLUEPRINT FOR COOPERATION

From coast to coast, border to border, there are Alliance success stories, each one unique, but sharing some of the same components. In Winston-Salem, North Carolina, for instance, where 3,000 employees may be affected by a series of layoffs, the Alliance has mobilized resources to respond to employee needs. The State Employment Service has requested support funds through the Federal Job Training Partnership Act. An outplacement committee maintains a computer terminal on the shop floor so employees can track regional job opportunities. An employee assistance center has also been established—much like the approach taken in Massachusetts at the Merrimack Valley facility.

Though much emphasis has been given to situations in which employees are facing displacement, Alliance programs are designed to do more. As Pam Joest, Alliance associate director, explains: "The Alliance is one program for all workers. We need to help people plan and manage their careers whether they're facing a layoff or not."

The Alliance local committee in Phoenix is a good example of a group that is offering a selection of career enhancement programs for workers who are not confronted with impending displacement. It gets high marks from participants because the topics are relevant and the scheduling is flexible. One employee explains, "You can go at any hour, depending on your shift. I can move at my own pace. I think it's a golden opportunity."

Whether managing worker layoffs or employee training needs to meet increasingly sophisticated technology, the Alliance applies every resource available. Since August 1986, when it was formed, the organization has grown and changed, tailoring and refining its programs as they need change.

In January 1988, the Alliance took on a new dimension when IBEW International President John Barry joined the Alliance Board of Trustees, thus providing services to its members in the nonmanufacturing sector. By the end of 1988, the Alliance had begun to assist IBEW-represented employees to prepare for other jobs through training and test preparation classes. "It's rewarding to see people move into secure jobs," says an IBEW cochair at a New Jersey site. "And that makes it rewarding for everyone involved."

From Arizona to New Jersey, the results speak for themselves. Since its inception, the Alliance has served some 3,300 laid-off workers through 17 projects and has helped secure over $2 million in grants for training laid-off workers. More than 6,500 people nationwide are involved in other work within AT&T as a result of Alliance activities. As of January 1989, there were 226 ALCs in 44 states. BIS surveys had been administered to 26,000 employees. Alliance activities had positively affected the lives of over 22,000 workers.

As the Alliance looks toward the future, the organization is poised to become a catalyst in the field of labor/company relations. Mary Jane Leahy and her Austin Alliance staff, just like their colleagues in New Jersey and Georgia, have been called on a number of times to work with local people in situations where traditional relationships have been adversarial. "When they realize the value of the Alliance and its programs to their people," Leahy explains, "they focus on the program and not so much on each other."

Alliance programs are currently focused on AT&T union-represented employees; but as the organization moves ahead, the Alliance may broaden the scope of people they serve. Director Goldberg asserts, "We want to develop a new work force by getting people involved in reading, math, and problem solving before they even enter the work force."

Morton Bahr, CWA President, believes the Alliance can play an important role in training educationally disadvantaged 16- to 25-year-olds to take their places in the work force. While AT&T will not be expected to pick up the tab, Bahr says, "We hope to get financing from other companies and the Federal Government—but the Alliance is the catalyst."

Perhaps the best summary is offered by Ann Duck, a local committee cochair from Florida. "The way I see it, you're not going to go anywhere if you don't grow. If the Alliance works, we'll have the most educated work force in the country. I'm part of it, and I'm realizing I have a lot to share that can help other people. That's exciting."

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